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ABSTRACT

High performance teams allow conflict to surface and then work toward understanding and resolution. Often when teams are in conflict, they appear to be in chaos. What may be occurring is that the conflict has allowed the team to access new information, and what appears to be chaos is actually reorganization around a new perspective. Capitalizing on conflict is an important skill for facilitators of experientially based team-building programs, as conflict has the potential to create change. Intrapersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflict are defined. Five personal styles of conflict management are described, along with the types of situations that render these styles effective or ineffective. These five styles are competitive, avoidant, accommodative, compromising, and collaborative. Paralleling the five personal styles are five styles of facilitating a group in conflict: "It's my group and I'm in charge"; "How much time is left?"; "Whatever you say, chief"; "You've got to give a little"; and "Yes, you've got it now." The last of these is similar to the collaborative personal style because it involves effective communication among all individuals who are disagreeing. Also called the facilitative style, this is the preferred mode of intervention for group leaders because the contribution of conflict to the growth process is honored. Suggestions are offered for dealing with group "saboteurs" and working with various types of conflict. A 2-day intervention to resolve conflict in a community college department is described. Contains 11 references. (SV)

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Abstract
Recognizing conflict as a tool for group empowerment is an important, yet often overlooked facilitation skill. The facilitative style of conflict management, which explores conflict as a source of change, will be presented. Participants will explore personal styles of conflict management. Applications to groups in conflict will be experientially presented.

Managing conflict is a subject which often brings up conflict within organizations. For example, the concept of high performance teams implies a group of individuals with a shared goal working together to meet their objectives. Conflict among members doesn't seem to belong to this concept. Yet, conflict still exists within the teams. In fact, high performance teams are characterized by their ability to allow conflict to surface and then work toward understanding and resolution (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Organizations are seeking experiential team building programs to assist in the development of high performance teams. Often the issue of managing conflict is not included as a goal of the team building program. In fact, often the goals of the program are to "get the teams working together." What if the ability to "work together" actually could be defined as the ability to handle conflict?

Teams consist of individual members each of whom brings different experiences, beliefs, skills and culturally diverse backgrounds. The differences among the members are what feeds the team. Any time groups of diverse individuals come together, the potential for conflict arises. Rather than work to avoid opposition among members, the differences are where the work of the team occurs. As in nature, systems organize through a process of breaking down into chaos and then reorganizing around a new basic form (Wheatley, 1992). Often when teams are in conflict, they appear to be in chaos. What may be occurring is that the conflict has allowed the team to access new information and what appears to be chaos is actually reorganization around a new perspective.

As facilitators of experientially based team building programs, capitalizing on the value of conflict is an important skill. In general, the goals of the client will not be to work on managing conflict except in cases in which the issue is keeping the team from producing results. Yet conflict will inevitably surface at some point during the team building activities. Facilitators who understand their own reactions and who are comfortable in the presence of conflict provide invaluable support to the team. Conflict has the potential to create change (Garfield, 1992).

What is Conflict?
Two types of conflicts that occur include intrapersonal and interpersonal (*How to Manage Conflict*, 1993). Intrapersonal refers to the stress of stepping outside of one's comfort zone. During a challenge course program we often ask participants to step outside of their comfort zones. In a sense, we are setting up a conflict by the very nature of our program. The individual's ability to cope with intrapersonal distress is directly related to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts.

Interpersonal conflict refers to disagreements that involve groups of people. In order for conflict to occur, there must be an interaction between two or more individuals or groups, imagined or real differences in values or goals, and the existence of power and control dynamics between the parties (Sanzotta, 1979). Intragroup and intergroup fall under the interpersonal heading. Intragroup deals with conflict among the members of a single group. This situation often arises during an experiential program. One member

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may be initiating conflict or the group may disagree on strategies and ideas. Intergroup conflict concerns disagreement between groups. Intergroup conflict may be a preexisting condition of an organization that surfaces during a team building program, especially if the groups are from mixed management teams.

Styles Of Conflict Management

There are generally five styles of conflict management. Each of the styles is effective in certain situations. Also, each individual favors one particular style. We tend to react to conflict with our favored personal style of management even if one of the other styles would be more appropriate to the particular situation. Understanding how you feel about conflict and recognizing your own style of management provides the starting point in realizing the value of disagreements within a group. The five styles, according to Scott (1990), are as follows:

Competitive

This style of conflict management emphasizes the importance of getting your own needs met while ignoring the needs of others. This is a win at any cost approach. This style is helpful when the issue is important to you, the authority to make the decision is yours, or when a quick answer is needed. In situations where preserving the relationship is important the competitive approach is not recommended. If used too often, you won't have any relationships to preserve!

Avoidant

Avoiding the conflict is the basis of this approach. You remain passive, nonassertive, or uncooperative. This style is helpful when a cooling off period is needed, the issue is unimportant to you, or you believe you cannot win. An avoidant approach is helpful when you feel you need more time to decide what to do. Avoidance strategies are ineffective when they are used to the extreme and conflicts never get addressed.

Accommodative

An accommodative style involves putting your needs aside while putting others' concerns first. Cooperation characterizes accommodation. You agree to give up your position in favor of the other person's view. Accommodation is effective when you have little investment in the outcome. This style is also useful when your goal is to keep the peace, or you want to temporarily resolve the issue until you can work out a solution you prefer. This style becomes ineffective when you develop resentment toward the others involved.

Collaborative

This style focuses on collaboration among the involved parties. An active approach, collaboration involves asserting your position while taking into account the needs of the others involved. One factor to be considered is that the collaborative approach is time consuming. Discovering the underlying needs and interests of the involved parties are characteristics of this style. This approach is useful when the outcome is important to all involved, when the relationships among the participants are important, and when all involved have the ability to communicate effectively. This style is inappropriate unless everyone makes a commitment to the process.

Compromising

Compromise is characterized by concessions and exchanges. Each person gives a little to reach a solution. This approach is more superficial than collaboration because you do not look for the underlying issues. A compromise style is effective when your goals are mutually exclusive, when a short term gain is of benefit, when a quick solution is needed, when other strategies have been ineffective, or when a compromise is the only way to preserve relationships. This style is inappropriate when you agree to give in without really meaning to let the issue go.

As an experiential group facilitator, your role in managing conflict switches from being one of personal involvement to facilitating conflict as it emerges. The role of the facilitator is to facilitate the group's

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ability to handle both intrapersonal and interpersonal discord. Recognizing the value of conflict is inherent to this process.

The following styles of facilitating a group in conflict have been adapted from the personal styles described earlier:

"It's my group and I'm in charge"
This style resembles the competitive approach. You believe that your role is to control what happens in the group. The facilitator who does not believe that conflict is valuable will tend to shut it down. Sometimes with this style you will inadvertently engage group members in conflict. This power and control battle emerges when you directly confront a disgruntled group member and a struggle for control of the group ensues. This style is helpful when safety issues are in question.

"How much time is left?"
Resembling the avoidant approach, with this style you avoid any hints of emerging conflict. The importance of conflict is neglected. You ignore and do not engage in any power struggles. Sometimes, the group or any of its members begin to run the group as you hope that the day will end before major disagreements pull the group apart. This style may be appropriate during short programs or when conflict come up toward the end of the program.

"Whatever you say, chief"_
The accommodative style is related to this approach. You really want to be liked by the group and may believe that disagreements will cause animosities. The CEO of the organization may be in the group and you want everything to run smoothly. The group may decide to break the rules in solving initiatives. They may even dictate which activities the group engages in. This style used in moderation is appropriate as a way to stay out of power struggles until the issue can be addressed at a later time.

"You've got to give a little"
With this approach you work to achieve a compromise with the group. Conflict is beginning to be used as a means of achieving cohesion within the group. This style is effective with minor issues such as allowing the group to decide when they want to take breaks. Power struggles can be avoided when the group feels they have the power to make choices. This style may also be effective when two or more group members engage each other in conflict.

"Yes, you've got it now"
This style is similar to the collaborative style because it involves effective communication among all the individuals who are disagreeing. The beneficial aspects of conflict are valued in this style. While this approach may be time consuming, a process for managing conflict is created. You actually mediate the disagreement. Modifications of this process are appropriate for most conflicts occurring during a team building experience.

The "Yes, you've got it now" style is also called the facilitative style and is the preferred mode of intervention for group leaders because the contribution of conflict to the growth process is honored. A group in conflict is well on their way to empowerment. One of the basic characteristics of this style is the creation of a safe physical and emotional space. Individuals are more likely to disclose their feelings when they are in a safe space. Avoiding blame, focusing on the process rather than the personality (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989), allowing all participants to be heard and using "I feel" statements are all elements of a safe emotional space. The facilitative approach also includes techniques for dealing with individual group members who challenge the facilitator for control of the group. These techniques include allowing the individual to have power without taking control of the group.

Dealing With Group Saboteurs
Individuals assume different and clearly defined roles while participating in a challenge course group experience. According to Lee (1980), the metaphoric roles include clan chief, advisors to the chief,

renegades, warring warriors, peaceful warriors, scout, clan hero, medicine person, grandparent, clown, cheerleaders or song leaders, heavyweights, sacrificial lambs and thieves. Individuals adopt these roles as a way to cope with intrapersonal conflict.

The warring warriors focus more on the outcome than the process and may discount safety rules. This behavior often opens up conflict within a group. The warring warrior tries to tell others what to do and often uses distracting behavior when not receiving attention. These "saboteurs" can be quite effective in splitting a group and challenging the facilitator for the power and control. The facilitative style sees the saboteur as a frustrated leader. Often such individuals have great ideas and are unable to effectively share them because of the need to dominate the group. The facilitative style recognizes the potential leadership skills that can be refocused for the individual caught in the role of saboteur. Rather than engaging in the power struggle the saboteur is seeking, the facilitative style enables the leader to give some control to the saboteur without turning over the power. Direct confrontation is avoided. Instead, the facilitator adapts the solution oriented approach (Gass & Gillis, 1995) by engaging the saboteur to share ideas through agreeing with the person whenever possible. For example, a saboteur may be complaining that an initiative is too easy and they are not feeling at all challenged. The individual may begin to discount the whole program by making underhanded remarks about the validity of the program which engages other group members. In the facilitative style, the person's concerns are acknowledged. The "say yes" technique, in which the facilitator keeps agreeing with the individual until all objections are defused is extremely useful. In this example, agreeing that the person has not felt challenged and may be bored, etc., eliminates the power struggle. After the saboteur has been acknowledged and agreed with, the opportunity to introduce new behaviors is created. The person can be given the opportunity to do the initiative blindfolded. After stating the need for a greater challenge the saboteur will most likely accept. The blindfold presents the opportunity for the person to experience a different role. The "warring" behaviors become transformed into a powerful experience for all involved.

Conflict Within A Group

Different types of conflict which emerge during a group activity can divide individuals and stop the process. We are often given a goal of assisting the group in working together. Suddenly, conflict appears and, rather than working together, the group seems to fall apart. A common tendency is to believe that the disagreement is in opposition to the goal of the program. The facilitative style appreciates the conflict as a valuable process step toward working together. The disagreement becomes the tool of empowerment. Conflicts may arise over cultural differences, leadership styles, or personality clashes. The cultural differences may involve ethnic or racial differences (Fernandez,1991) or revolve around differences in corporate cultures and roles (Raelin, 1985). The experiential program serves to bring the underlying issues to the surface.

The facilitative style welcomes the opportunity to work with conflict. One technique that is effective if time is not a factor is to break from the activity sequence and move into a mediation process. The facilitator normalizes the whole idea of conflict and sets up boundaries for the participants to communicate with one another. For example, participants are coached to avoid blaming by using "I feel" statements. Group members have the experience of directly sharing their feelings within a safe setting. The group also learns a process of conflict management which they can take back to the workplace. This process requires time to complete. Ideally, the group will have time to participate in a group activity after the mediation process to integrate the outcome of the resolution setting.

Another technique when conflict erupts is to move directly into an activity which is frontloaded with the issues. The disagreement is openly acknowledged and the group has the opportunity to deal with the conflict. This approach is effective when time constraints are a factor. Sometimes a group is unable to resolve the problem. The facilitative style does not consider this situation to be a failure. Instead, the group is honored for allowing the issue to surface and to be addressed. The facilitator may choose to share some of the tools of the mediation process mentioned earlier which the group can use at a later time. Allowing a group to own their conflict and leave the program with unresolved disagreements is a powerful gift we as facilitators can give.

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Group Conflict Intervention

Unmanaged conflict, at some point, will interfere with a team's ability to be productive. Organizations begin to look for outside intervention when the group's struggles result in a profit loss and the team appears to be stuck. Experiential programming, using a facilitative style, is an effective strategy for moving the team forward.

An example of such a program occurred with a department of a community college that was identified by administrators as a "problem group." The department was losing money and members were angry with each other, with the supervisor and with the administration. Everyone involved felt helpless and believed that there were no solutions other than firing the department head which was not a possibility. Instead they chose a ropes course program as a final attempt to resolve the issue before closing the department became necessary.

The program was designed as a two-day program with two facilitators even though the department was small. Two facilitators were important in order to avoid splitting. Day one consisted of low ropes initiatives. A solution oriented approach was used to keep the focus on situations in which the group was able to work together. While the conflict was acknowledged, the emphasis was placed on any success the group achieved. By the end of day group members had experienced success together and some of the hopelessness was lifted. They were asked to write down one problem they would like to see changed at work and bring it with them the following day.

Day two consisted of a mediation process in which each person named their problem. They were then instructed to take out any blame by turning the problem into an "I feel" statement. The third step involved relating the issue to a systems breakdown. The purpose of step three was to de-emphasize personality clashes and to stay away from personal issues. Often in work settings, if too much personal information is revealed, the co-workers feel too vulnerable when they return to the office setting. While personal disclosures were encouraged, referring back to the systemic problem kept a safe focus for the group. They brain-stormed a solution for each problem. By the end of the day each team member had committed to making one behavioral change. They also developed a way in which to restructure their system of communication. The team felt hopeful and related to each other with less hostility. Follow up contacts indicated that the team had improved their productivity and was complaining less. Members reportedly were feeling more positive and projects were being completed.

Conclusion

Conflict as a change agent is a powerful concept for facilitators to capitalize on during team building programs. An important facilitation skill is to understand your own style of conflict management. Choosing the appropriate technique as disagreements emerges within a group is the second step to this process. Allowing conflict to become a positive and safe space creates a new dimension for group facilitation. Providing the tools for managing conflict assists in the transfer of learning. Clients are presented with a new opportunity for growth.

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Biographies

Tim Haggstrom is a co-director of The Chosen Path, an experiential training organization which provides empowerment through experience. He is also an independent contractor who facilitates challenge course programs throughout North America. Tim's primary experience is in the corporate and therapeutic areas of group facilitation. Tim has been an experiential facilitator for 12 years.

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